

The Depression affected Lehi Business

By Richard Van Wagoner

The 1920's brought good fortune to most Lehi citizens as well as to Americans across the country. People called it the "Coolidge prosperity" in honor of U.S. President Calvin Coolidge. But the halcyon decade ended in fear and anxiety. The worst economic downturn in world history, known as the Great Depression began in October 1929, when stock values plunged into dramatically.

Thousands of investors lost vast sums of money. Banks, factories, and stores closed, leaving millions of Americans penniless and jobless.. Until 1942, and the upsurge of war industries, the country and most of the world remained in the worst and longest period of high unemployment and low business productivity in modern times.

Republican President Herbert Hoover believing in limiting the power of federal government enacted few measure to deal with the floundering economy. Near the end of his administration, Congress approved Hoover's most successful anti-depression measure: the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC).

Most Americans, however felt that Hoover was not doing enough to bolster the economy and elected Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932. Roosevelt convinced that it was the government's obligation to end the Depression called Congress into a special session to erect laws to reach this goal. The programs which evolved from these efforts were called the New Deal.

Laws established under New Deal legislation had three main purposes: to provide relief for the needy, to create jobs and encourage business expansion, and to reform business and government practices to prevent further depressions.

The Depression affected Lehi citizens in a multitude of ways. Those with money found the low prices put them in a better financial position that they had

been in the 1920's. Corn Flakes at Peterson's Square Deal Grocer sold for 10 cents a box, and Broadbent's advertised coffee at 20 cents per pound. Van's Cash and Carry advertised 12.5 cents per pound hamburger and sirloin steak sold for just 18 cents per pound. Gasoline prices hovered around 18 cents per gallon.

A popular song of the day was "Begin the Benguine". On Sunday evenings, Jack Benny wise-cracked over the radio to his wife, Mary Livingston, and the popular comedian, Rochester. Another radio favorite of the times was Eddie Canton, who ended his program by singing, "It was nice to spend Sunday with you. I'll be sorry when we're through".

Political news came in on the radio abroad. Mussolini was invading Ethiopia. Announcements told of British acclaim for King Edward VIII, who was not yet entangled in gossip over his romantic involvement with America's adventurous Wallis Simpson. There was also alarming news of terrible dust storms originating in parched fields of the midwest.

On the bright side in Lehi, tickets to movies at the Royal Theatre, where "talkies" were not commonplace were just 10 cents-one thin dime, one tenth of a dollar. Occasionally both the Royal and the Cozy theatres gave away tickets to keep patrons spirits up. Most businesses struggled to stay afloat.

Except for the Jones Dental office, the subject of last week's feature, no new commercial building was constructed in Lehi from 1929 through 1945. The first Main Street business house to result from post-world War II prosperity was Price Brothers' IGA Market.

In October 1945 construction began on the new market at 12 West Main. Leland Price, co-owner and butcher at the People's store on State Street and his brother William, former groceryman and butcher at the People's Co-op (and several other markets in Provo, Cedar City, and Heber) opened Price Brothers' IGA on January 28, 1945.

The 34 by 75 foot building, constructed by local contractor Alma Peterson, became the pattern for three other commercial structures built by Peterson in 1946-47. Still-standing, these business houses are at 35 West Main, 173 West Main and 151 East State.

The four structures have a red brick front. This dovetails uniquely with the side walls which are constructed of white pumice stone building blocks which were manufactured by Lehi Block Company.

Incorporating all the latest designs and features of food markets, the new grocery, meat and fruits and vegetable store was “the last word in such institutions.” The IGA housed a large walk-in type meat refrigerator, a large sanitary meat display case, a self-service case for dairy products (only the seventh one in Utah), and an all metal vegetable case.

The addition of their friendly serve, the Prices have always been noted for their quality meat department. The business is also recognized for its employment of family member's Lee and Bill's father John, who had worked at the People's Co-op for more than twenty-five years, worked part time in the store until his death. Their younger brother Rex and brother-in-law Boyd Stewart also became partners in the firm. Most of their children found part-time work in the store while attending school.

In 1975 Lee and Bill Price retired and sold the store to Rex and Boyd. The new name became Super Quality Market. In 1988 Price bought Stewart interests and along with several of his family members continued for many years to operate the store.